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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with President of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Notetakers: Jill Sandler, Jeff Blair,
Mark Robinson, and Diana Trevino

Interpreters: Yuri Shkeyrov

DATE, TIME March 6, 2003, 4:21 - 4:53 p.m. EST
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Vladimir, how are you at 0120 in the morning?
I'm amazed you're still awake. (U)

President Putin: It's actually only 12:20. I just arrived from
Siberia, I just got to Sochi. It's 10 degrees above centigrade
here, while in Siberia it was 30 degrees below. (U)

The President: I always knew you were a strong man. A couple
of quick points before you go to bed. I told you we would talk.
Colin will talk to Igor, Condi talked to Sergei, on how to get
your advice, if possible, on how to move forward on a resolution
with Iraq. I'd like it if we could go together, but one of the
caveats is this process can't drive on much longer. If you are
in a position to veto, this would be very damaging and we have
to try to avoid that. It's important to get a resolution.
Someone mentioned that we should not pass a resolution, but your
friend and mine, Tony Blair, really needs one, so we're going to
push it, so there will be a vote. And my sincere hope is we get
our respective parties to come up with a solution that is
satisfactory for both of us. Let Igor and Colin work on the
language. If they come up with something, it would be a very
important signal to the entire world. The French, I don't know
what they're doing, but it is not helpful. You assured me that
you would not get involved in European politics, and that is
good, but really, I'd just like your opinion. (U)

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President Putin: George, what I meant is that I said we're not going to turn the Iraqi situation into a domestic political problem. We don't want to use this in order to fuel the anti-American feelings. We are not doing that now and we won't do that in the future either. But this does not mean we don't have an internal problem here. Our position has been stated a long time ago and it was always open and we stated it publicly. My colleagues and I spoke to Condi, to Secretary Rumsfeld, and to you and we have not changed our policy. It's hard to say that we said one thing and then put you and Blair in a difficult position. I used to say that 1441 was not needed because we could have continued with Iraq with the previous resolutions. But to support you and Tony, I gave instructions in a way to support this resolution. I know that Tony is facing a hot situation back in his country and I don't want to create any difficulties that would hurt our relationship and I don't want our relationship to get worse. But if we take a decision that doesn't address our interests, then we will find ourselves in difficulty and will be facing problems in international relations. You know that last year, the international committee of the U.N. considered the human rights situation in Chechnya and the anti-Russian resolution was not passed only because of the Islamic states. Today, we cannot spoil our relations with the Islamic states. We will not receive support from our new allies. There are other problems as well. We have always been frank and sincere and we were open in St. Petersburg with you, me, Condi, and Igor. Our relations have always been open and honest and that has been my attitude to the United States and to you personally and will always remain so. We believe that hostilities are a mistake and we should not elaborate on this over the phone. We are prepared to discuss any option that does not lead to war and Ivanov will be prepared to talk seriously about the text as long as it doesn't lead to war. With regard to the European position, they can coincide with our position, it is irrelevant. We will not take a position that will fuel anti-American sentiments. And irrespective of the developments, our strategic aim is to develop our relationship. Ratification of the treaty on strategic armaments should go the way we have agreed. Tomorrow, I'll talk to Blair. We were supposed to talk today, but maybe he was aware we would talk today and put it off until tomorrow. We have put our pressure on Iraq and Ivanov has already told that to Condi. I sent Mr. Primakov who met Saddam Hussein and proposed that Saddam leave office. I believe you were informed and made aware of his reaction. Well, we are looking for an option that would please all the sides. If we succeed, we will be very happy. If not, well there's nothing

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3

that can be done. There are certain things that we can't overcome, a redline we can't cross. We can't accept war and you may have a different view. We cannot act erroneously. Well, I don't want to discuss what we have achieved from Saddam. I know you think this is not sufficient, but I think that I will keep in touch. ~~(S)~~

The President: Thank you Vladimir for your point of view. We do have a frank relationship and that is important. We do have evidence that Saddam is a threat to the security of the American people. Therefore he must be disarmed now. It's a serious matter and I understand your position on the resolution but a veto along with the French will damage relations. I don't want that and I know you don't want that. ~~(S)~~

President Putin: George, I don't want that at all. I can repeat that only once again. Our position was fair and clear from the very beginning. To tell you frankly, I don't think Saddam is a threat to America. He is not even a threat to his neighbors, because this is a weakened state and I believe your experts understand that fully well. ~~(S)~~

The President: Vladimir, that's a difference of opinion. I don't think I'm being fooled by experts. Just as we supported you regarding the terrorists in Moscow. Look, we can argue all day long whether or not he is a threat. I believe Saddam is a threat to the American people. So we just need to understand the gravity of the situation. Colin will work with Igor on language, but a veto would be a disaster. ~~(S)~~

President Putin: I don't want to change our position especially with regard with terrorism. We've always supported you. Our support on 9/11 was very expressive, and we are not changing our position and we have been cooperating very closely. I think our cooperation was better after 9/11 than during World War II, better than any time in the history of our relations. You are in a better place to see where things are and to make decisions on the interests of the United States, but I think beginning a war is a mistake. We have invited Condi to come to Moscow to discuss this in more detail, but, given this situation, we can hardly change our position, and we will have to vote against. ~~(S)~~

The President: That's going to be a problem. So, we'll have to see if Colin and Igor can work it out. Because to me, this resolution is for Tony's sake. We've got what we've need in

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4

1441 and this obviously creates real tension and we'll have to deal with that. (C)

President Putin: I can only regret that. It is not in our interest to spoil our relations with somebody and create difficulties with anybody. To tell you frankly, we didn't succeed in establishing a dialogue on this topic. We said what we can do and what we can't. You listened, but you did not hear that. I realize that Tony is in a difficult situation in his party, and we, of course, don't want to do him harm. But we've mentioned to him that we can go up to a certain line but we won't be able to cross it. He did not hear that, and that is a great pity. (C)

The President: We listen to you very carefully, Vladimir, and you need to hear that. This has nothing to do with our relationship but with Saddam and his threat to the United States. If he doesn't disarm, we will disarm him with a lot of countries by our side. I know you don't agree with my assessment, but it is my obligation as the President of the United States. A veto won't help; it will only deepen the split. Plus, there's a post-Saddam Iraq and we won't be able to deal if there is a veto. It's important for you know my position. Saddam's fooling the world and you have to make a decision whether he's a threat or not. Look, we could talk until its 10 A.M. your time. It's very important for you to know our position. I've waited a long time, I've been patient, and we just have a difference in opinion as to whether you think he is a threat or not. (C)

President Putin: I would like for you to understand me that I don't have any liking for Saddam and I don't want to help him. I did not want to tell you, but when Primakov told Saddam to step down, he said, "You now state the United States position." Saddam got up and walked out. There's no need to laugh at that. We had other proposals to offer him. We have no liking for Saddam. You are the president of your country and you have the right to make the right decision. I agree that the problem is there but it can be tackled differently. There are other problems that we are facing and there are other problems here that I'm facing. The Security Council is a body where the positions are agreed upon and if nothing can be agreed upon, there is no reason for the Security Council. (C)

The President: First of all, thank you for trying to get him to leave. He's not going to leave without any pressure. I just wish you had been successful. The vote will be soon and I'm

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5

confident we'll be talking before then. I hope that you'll take this into serious consideration and I wish you the best. (U)

President Putin: Thank you very much. Please give my regards to Laura. I wanted to call you earlier, but I only had a cell phone. I know that Condi is sitting next to you please give her my regards to her. (U)

The President: Yes, she's right here waving. Very seriously, take what I said and give my best to Lyudmila. (U)

President Putin: Thank you very much, I was happy to hear from you. (U)

The President: Good-bye. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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